

# Domestic Abuse Court planning meeting is Oct. 11 in Greenville

October 6, 2010

Chancery Judge Marie Wilson has scheduled a planning meeting for 5 p.m. Monday, Oct. 11, to discuss development of the Washington County Domestic Abuse Court. The meeting will be held in the First Floor Chancery Courtroom at the Washington County Courthouse in Greenville.

Judge Wilson expects to coordinate a program which will accept referrals of victims and defendants from Municipal, Justice, County and Circuit Courts. The Oct. 11 meeting will bring together representatives of all levels of participating courts, local government representatives, the bar and clergy.

Judge Wilson said that she called the first planning meeting “to gather all the partners together so that we all have the same concept of how the Domestic Abuse Court will work.”

Participants are expected to include Senior Circuit Judge Betty W. Sanders, Washington County Justice Court Judge Laverne Holmes Carter, Greenville Municipal Judge Michael Prewitt, Hollandale Municipal Judge Jaribu Hill, Special Assistant Attorney General Heather Wagner of the Domestic Violence Division of the Attorney General’s Office, Washington County Administrator Elizabeth Smith; Washington County Chancery Clerk Marilyn Hansell, Our House Inc. Executive Director Patricia Davenport, North Mississippi Rural Legal Services attorneys Ruby White and Alsee McDaniel, attorney George Kelly, Greenville Police Department domestic violence officer Sgt. Rosetta Williams, Mississippi Department of Human Services Access and Visitation Program Director Ruth Ann Williams, New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church pastor Rev. Myron Holmes, Chancery Court Law Clerk Tiarra Tanner, and Chancery Court Administrator Itonia Williams.

The Domestic Abuse Court, operated within the Chancery Court, will assess the needs of the victim and the accused offender, help both sides get legal representation, refer them to counseling and a behavior modification program, and monitor their progress. The problem-solving court will operate in a manner similar to drug courts.

Judge Wilson said, “The objective is to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse in Washington County. Domestic violence has claimed the lives of some victims and severely injured other victims in Washington County. We recognize that it’s a very serious problem that is ongoing and needs to be addressed, apparently very differently from the way we have been addressing it.”

The Domestic Abuse Court will be funded through a two-year grant totaling \$172,609. Funding is provided by the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women. The grant, made under the Court Training and Improvements Program, is to provide support to court and court-based initiatives that aim to improve civil and criminal court functions, enhance court infrastructure and improve court responses to victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking. The Washington County Chancery Court will establish a civil domestic abuse court to improve the judicial handling of domestic violence, dating violence and/or stalking cases, ensure offender accountability, and promote informed judicial decision making.

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